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ABSTRACT

News professionalism is an efficient and effective means of controlling the working behavior of journalists. The norms of news professionalism determine legitimate arenas and news sources, and although journalists do not set out to report news so that the existing political and economic system is maintained, their norms end up producing stories that implicitly support the existing order. Furthermore, professional norms legitimize the existing order by making it appear to be a natural state of affairs. In addition to allowing news organizations to maximize audience size and maintain marketplace controls, news professionalism results in coverage that does not threaten the economic position of the organization or the overall system in which it operates. Since professionalism is independent of any one organization, journalists have a power base to use as a lever against management, and management limits potential conflict by establishing policies that further limit the professional behavior of journalists. The boundaries created by this interplay are broad enough to permit some creativity in reporting, editing, and presenting news stories, and narrow enough so that journalists must act in the interest of the news organization. (CRH)

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Qualitative Studies Division

News Reporting and Professionalism:

Some Constraints on the Reporting of the News

by

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Paper presented to the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention, Gainesville, Florida, August 5-8, 1984.

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News Reporting and Professionalism
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Drawing upon organizational theory and the literature of professionalism, this paper argues that news professinalism is an efficient and effective means for controlling the professional behavior of journalists. The paper attempts to show how the norms of news professionalism determine the legitimate arenas and sources of news in this country. The tenets of news professionalism result in news coverage that does not threaten either the economic position of the individual news organization or the overall politico-economic system in which the news organization operates. News professionalism produces news stories that permit news organizations to maximize audience size and to maintain firm control over the marketplace.

Since news professionalism is independent of any one news organization, news professionalism provides journalists with an independent power base that can be used against management. To minimize the potential for conflict, management needs to establish policies that further limit the professional behavior of its journalists. Although the specific nature of these policies will vary from organization to organization, the purpose of the policies does not. News policies lessen the potential conflict between journalists and management, and there is no reason to assume that an organization's policies will be a source of tension between management and journalists. Provided, of course, that policies conform to the norms of news professionalism.

The organizational nature of news is determined by the interplay between the trans-organizational control mechanism represented by news professionalism and the intra-organizational control mechanisms of news policies. Together, these control mechanisms help to establish boundaries for the professional behavior of journalists. It would be wrong to assume that these boundaries dictate specific actions on the part of journalists; rather these boundaries provide a framework for action. The boundaries are broad enough to permit journalists some creativity in the reporting, editing and presentation of news stories. But, on the other hand, the boundaries are narrow enough so that journalists can be trusted to act in the interest of the news organization.

The[1] romantic vision of journalism is that of a crusading reporter who, much to the consternation of a cantankerous but benevolent editor, takes on one of the more villainous politicians in the city, and after some hard work and a bit of luck, catches the politician "red-handed," helps to send him to jail and betters the lives of the downtrodden and helpless. This myth has many versions, some less grand but all of them are more or less the same. Imbedded in these myths are many of the professional norms and values of journalism as it is practiced in this country. To fully understand the process by which events are selected for presentation as news, it is necessary to examine news professionalism.

Much ink has been spilled over arguments about whether or not journalism is a bona fide profession. Even more ink has been used by scholars who have attempted to identify the criteria that make an occupation a profession, but, as Hughes points out, this is not a very important issue.[2] It is not important to argue about which occupations qualify as professions, but what is important is to ask what it means for an occupation to claim it is a profession. With this as a jumping off point, this paper will attempt to show how journalistic professionalism affects the gathering and reporting of the news. Specifically, the paper argues that professionalism is an efficient and economical method by which news organizations control the behavior of reporters and editors. With this as the backdrop, the paper goes on to report the results of a participant observation study that examined how a news organization enforces news policy.[3]

Since journalists work within profit-making business organizations, news

organizations need to develop techniques for controlling the behavior of their professional employees. If the news organization is conceptualized as an open system[4] composed of subsystems that are interrelated and interconnected with one another and with the larger organization then the problem of control becomes clearer. Typically, subsystems of an organization exhibit the characteristics of both wholes or parts. That is, at one level the subsystem is a whole and its teleological behavior is not completely controlled by the larger organization; at another level, the subsystem is part of the larger organization and is, to an extent, controlled by it. This means that a subsystem of an organization may pursue a variety of goals simultaneously, and some of them may be in conflict with the goals of the organization. To ensure its long-term survival, however, management must develop techniques for controlling the behavior of its subsystems. The nature of these control procedures will be related to the environment in which an organization operates.[5] The more stable (predictable) the environment, the more structured (bureaucratic) an organization will be. Complex and unpredictable environments require an informal and flexible structure so that the various subsystems can better deal with rapid changes.[6]

The news department as a subsystem of a news organization must deal with a highly unpredictable environment--news. Decisions about news coverage must be reached rapidly, with little time for discussions or group decision making. Thus, the structure of the news department must be fluid enough to deal with a constantly changing news environment. Reporters and editors must have considerable autonomy in the selection and processing of the news. Controlling the behavior of its journalists could be a difficult problem for management of a news organization, especially since reporters spend most of their time outside of the newsroom and out of sight of supervisors. One method management could use to control its journalists would be to establish elaborate rules and regulations. This bureaucratic form of administration would not be very effi-

cient because (1) the rules would have to cover all possible situations that journalists might encounter, including rules to deal with situations not covered by the rules; (2) elaborate rules are prescriptive and would limit a journalist's ability to deal with the unexpected which is the essence of news; and (3) the news organization's management would have to establish an expensive and time-consuming system for teaching its journalists the rules and regulations. A more efficient method for controlling behavior in non-bureaucratic organizations, such as news organizations, is through professionalism. Professionalism "makes the use of discretion predictable. It relieves bureaucratic organizations of responsibility for devising their own mechanisms of control in the discretionary areas of work."[7]

Ideology of Professionalism

The vast literature on professionalism is preoccupied with two major historical-sociological pursuits: (1) attempts to define what a profession is, usually based on a historical analysis of the rise of medicine and law, and (2) examinations of the relationships between professionals and bureaucratic business organizations that employ them. The first pursuit is the older of the two and is responsible for much of the literature on professionalism. The second approach recognizes the inadequacy of the model of professionalism that was built on the older, free professions like medicine and law, since the newer, dependent professions--such as engineering, accountancy and journalism--operate within profit-making business organizations. This second theme will be the primary concern of this paper.

For many scholars of professionalism, the goals and procedures of bureaucratic business organizations will inevitably lead to conflict with the goals and procedures of their professional employees. Kornhauser writes that "There are built-in strains between work establishments and professional

institutions with respect to (a) goals for professional work, (b) controls for professional work, (c) incentives for professional work and (d) influence of professional work."[8] Although there are many facets to this conflict, the most important one is that the professionals' allegiances to the norms of the professions will eventually bring the professionals into conflict with the profit motive of the business organization. Freedom to pursue professional goals will be severely curtailed by the organization, and the performance and standing of professionals within the organization will be evaluated by managers according to organizational and not professional goals.

Those scholars who argue that conflict exists between the bureaucratic business organization and its professional employees assume that the ideology of capitalism and the ideology of professionalism are not compatible. On the surface, the ideology of professionalism has a strong anti-profit and anti-market components which are manifested in the idea of service to society. Cost is not seen as being the determining factor in the delivery of professional services. Physicians, for example, provide a service that has come to be seen as a universal good that should be available to everyone regardless of a patient's ability to pay for the services.[9] Although most professionals are well paid, service to society and not financial rewards is seen as being the primary reason for becoming a professional. But this altruistic and anti-profit nature of professionalism tends to obfuscate the close relationship between professionalism and capitalism.

In her seminal work on the rise of professionalism, Larson argues convincingly that professionalism and capitalism are closely related and share the same historical roots.[10] The history of professionalism is marked by long and often bitter struggles by competing occupations to secure a monopoly in the professional marketplace. A profession cannot exist if two or more occupations lay claim to the cognitive base of the would-be profession.[11] The histories

of law and medicine are replete with examples of how competing occupations attempted to capture the professions through legal, legislative and moral arguments.[12] For a profession to exist, it must secure control over the cognitive base of the profession. To do this, a profession requires (1) that a body of esoteric and fairly stable body of knowledge about the professional task be mastered by all practitioners, and (2) that the public accepts the professionals as being the only individuals capable of delivering the professional services. By securing control over the cognitive base of the profession, the profession also establishes a monopoly in the professional marketplace. Competition between members of the same profession can occur, but there is no competition between professions for the right to provide the same professional services. If that were the case, then the cognitive base of the profession would be claimed by more than one occupation and the legitimacy of the services provided and the methods employed would be challenged.

The public's acceptance of a profession's monopoly in the marketplace is not difficult to achieve mainly because the professions are seen as being highly democratic. Professions maintain a strong ideal of service to society and many of the professions' services have come to be seen as universal goods that are available to all in need of them. In the public's eyes, membership in the professions is not based on social class but on the innate abilities of would-be professionals. The success or failure of an individual to be a professional is determined by his or her intelligence, dedication and perseverance.

To facilitate their control over the cognitive base and to standardize professional training, most professions control the professional education process through the establishment of accredited professional schools in colleges and universities.[13] These professional schools ensure (1) that future professionals have learned, mastered and accepted the prevailing

cognitive base of the profession; (2) that the production of the producers of the professional services is standardized;[14] and (3) that the profession's ideals and goals are accepted by the new professionals. It is during their formal education that the professionals-in-training are socialized to their professions, learning professional norms and procedures. This means more than just learning correct professional technique, it means learning how to structure and live ones life as a professional.[15]

Control over professional education and monopolization of the professional marketplace cannot take place unless the ideology of professionalism is closely linked to the ideology of capitalism. Larson argues that the professionalization process helps to maintain and promulgate capitalism, especially when capitalism moved from its competitive phase into its monopoly phase. The rise of large corporations during monopoly capitalism minimized the uncontrolled competition built on the free marketplace model which threatened to bring about the collapse of capitalism.[16] The relatively small number of large business organizations may have made competition more rational and predictable, but the problem of having to manage large numbers of people over large geographical areas became more acute. The problem of control within the large business organizations was solved by the rise of the manager. Larson argues that "the overall cognitive and normative legitimation for the rise of the manager" was science, especially as it was embodied in Taylorism.[17] Management's appeal to science for its legitimation meant that management was portrayed as being built on methods that were non-ideological and thus outside of any class interest. Management's reliance on science--the mastering of esoteric knowledge and skills-is the same foundation on which the professionalization process rests. And the position of both manager and professional is further secured by the rise of large business organizations which became the source of new occupations and careers for the middle class.[18]

In the final analysis, then, the arguments that are used to legitimize the professions in society are the same arguments used to legitimize management. And there is no reason to assume that there is an inherent conflict between the professionalization process and the managing of large business organizations.

In monopoly capitalism, new professions arose that were unable to exercise as much control over their work situation as the free professions could. Engineering, accountancy and journalism depend on large business organizations for their employment. Work assignments and the choice of clients are, for the most part, out of the hands of these professionals. But these professionals have been able to achieve social status through financial compensation, upward mobility and distinctive work tasks that require special skills. To facilitate control in the work place, management has come to rely on professionalism to control the behavior of its key employees. Professionalism, then, must be seen as an efficient and rational means of administering complex business organizations.

In summary, professionalism and the bureaucratic business organization cannot be conceived of as being opposite poles on a continuum of freedom and control. Both bureaucratic business organizations and professionalism "belong to the same historical matrix: they consolidated in the early 20th century as distinct but nevertheless complementary modes of work organization."[19] And, as Stinchcombe has shown, the type of administration (bureaucratic or professionalism) used by an organization will depend on the work situation: the less stable the work environment, the greater the reliance on professionalism.[20]

News Professionalism

News professionalism controls the behavior of journalists in two related

ways: (1) it sets standards and norms of behavior, and (2) it determines the professional reward system.

Since news professionalism establishes norms of conduct for journalists, it is unnecessary for individual news organizations to arbitrarily establish elaborate rules and regulations for staff members. Also, there is no need for news organizations to establish expensive and time-consuming training programs for new journalists since all journalists come to the organization with a certain amount of professional training. But unlike engineering or accountancy, there are a number of educational paths that lead to careers in journalism.[21] News organizations, then, cannot assume that all journalists have received the same professional training. Journalism cannot rely just on controlling the professional education to achieve cognitive standardization necessary for professionalism. To be certain that journalists have learned and accepted the same cognitive base, journalism has established a fairly elaborate apprenticeship system. This apprenticeship system works both across news organizations and within news organizations. A would-be journalist must prove his or her professional abilities by working as a journalist usually for a small news organization. And as the journalist gains professional experience, he or she is able to move on to a more prestigious news organization. Within a news organization, the newly-hired journalist must prove his or her professinal skills before being permitted to cover more important news stories.

Through formal professional education, on-the-job professional training or, as is usually the case, a combination of these,[22] journalists come to share the cognitive base of news professionalism. The norms of behavior that emanate from news professinalism constitute a trans-organizational control mechanism. Since the behavior of journalists is rooted--to a great extent--in shared professional norms, this minimizes the problem of how news organizations are able to maintain control over journalists. But shared professional norms

do not eliminate completely the problem of organizational control because (1) professionalism provides journalists with an independent power base that can be used to thwart heavy-handed interference by management in the professional activities of the news staff, and (2) professionalism provides too much freedom for journalists and thus news organizations must adopt procedures that further limit the professional behavior of their journalists. By examining some professionalism norms, we can show how news professionalism guides the behavior of journalists.

Professional Norms

For journalists in the United States, objectivity is the most important professional norm, and from it flows more specific aspects of news professionalism such as news judgment, the selection of sources and the structure of news beats. Objectivity does not reside in news stories themselves; rather it resides in the behavior of journalists.[23] Journalists must act in ways that permit them to report the news objectively. For journalists, objectivity does not mean that they are impartial observers of events--as it does for the social scientist--but that they seek out the facts and report them as fairly and as balanced as possible. As Phillips notes, by having journalists define objectivity as being the balanced reporting of the facts, the question of whether or not objectivity is possible in its scientific sense is neatly sidestepped. "By definition, then, journalists are turned into copying machines who simply record the world rather than evaluate it."[24] This makes it incumbent on the journalist to seek out the facts from all "legitimate" sides of an issue and then to report the facts in an impartial and balanced way. It would be an oversimplification to suggest that the selection of issues to cover and the choice of sources to present to the public in news stories is politically motivated. It is true that news legitimizes and supports the existing

politico-economic system, but it is not true tht journalists' selection of news stories reflects a conscious desire on their part to report the news in such a way that the status quo is maintained.

Objectivity, as practiced by journalists, is an eminently practical--and apparently highly successful--way of dealing with the complex needs of journalists, news organizations and audiences. Journalists need to reach a wide and diverse audience, and objectivity is an efficient method of making the news accpetable to all members of the audience. Specific audience members may not get the news reported according to their own political perspectives, but at least they are not getting the news reported in a politically or morally upsetting way. By concentrating on a balanced presentation of the facts, journalists are able to satisfy more members of the audience than if they were to report the news in an overtly political manner. For the news organization, this means that the potential market for its product is large, which means more lucrative advertising contracts than if the audience were segmented according to political attitudes.

A definition of objectivity as the fair and balanced presentation of facts makes journalists both event oriented and non-ideological. Events can be safely presented as a series of facts that require no explanation of their political significance. By presenting the news as a series of facts, news organizations are protected in at least two ways. The first and most obvious way is that since journalists need to rely on sources to provide them with the facts about events, sources and not journalists are responsible for the accuracy of the facts. To a limited degree, this helps to insulate both journalists and their news organization from charges of bias and inaccurate reporting.[25] Being duped by a news source is embarrassing to the news organization, but, provided it does not happen often, the integrity of the news organization is not threatened. The news organization's position in the

marketplace is directly linked to its ability to maintain the integrity of its news operation. And this brings us to the second advantage objectivity has for news organizations: it helps to secure their monopoly position in the marketplace.[26] If the news were to be reported in an overtly political or ideological way, the market would be ripe for competition from news organizations that held opposing political or ideological points of view. By reporting the news objectively, reader loyalty to a newspaper is not a function of the ideology of that newspaper. It is rather based on the thoroughness of the news coverage, subscription costs, delivery services or some other tangible factor that a newspaper can control. Therefore, as long as news organizations report the news objectively, monopoly control of the marketplace will not be seen as being much of a problem by audiences, journalists, advertisers and media owners. Provided, of course, that media owners do not take advantage of their monopoly position by making excess profits at the expense of meeting the audience's need to know the news.

Since journalistic objectivity stresses a reliance on finding and reporting the facts and since journalists themselves are unable to witness most news events, journalists are dependent on news sources to provide them with the necessary facts. Because much of the news deals with opinions or interpretations of events or with information that is difficult to verify, journalists are able to achieve factuality by having sources express these opinions or interpretations. Factuality, then, does not reside in the truthfulness of a statement but in the fact the the source made the statement.[27] The credibility of a news source is related to the source's position of power: credibility increases with the degree of power attributed to the source.

Journalists are non-ideological in the sense that they do not report the news according to an ideological perspective that is consciously shared by the

members of the profession. Therefore, the natural place to find newsworthy sources will be in the power structure of society because journalists see the current politico-economic system as the natural state of affairs.[28] News sources, then, are drawn from the existing power structure; therefore, news tends to support the status quo. But journalists do not set out to consciously report the news so that the current politico-economic system is maintained. The selection of news events and news sources flows "naturally" from news professionalism. This does not mean that news judgements do not change; nor does it mean that journalists do not differ in their news judgments, but differences are worked out within a specific frame of reference, namely that of the prevailing norms of news professionalism. Furthermore, news judgment requires that journalists share assumptions about what is normal in society, since an event's newsworthiness is related to its departure from what is considered to be normal. By concentrating on the deviant, the odd and the unusual, journalists implicitly support the norms and values of society. Like fables, news stories contain hidden morals.

While the selection and presentation of news events and sources is determined by news professionalism, the news organization for which a journalist works will also influence this process. For instance, in an effort to maximize its return on its economic investment, the news organization routinizes news coverage through the establishment of news beats.[29] The choice of beats results from the interplay of news professionalism and the resources of the news organization. News professionalism will determine the legitimacy and value of news beats, but the news organization, through its control over the news department's budget, will determine the number of beats to be covered. News professionalism identifies more legitimate news beats than can be covered by journalists on the staff.

Since the decisions on which beats to cover reflects news

professionalism, the beat structure of a news organization reflects the power structure of society. Furthermore, the size of beats and the lack of time make journalists even more dependent on sources--particularly official sources--to supply them with facts.

The Professional Ladder

In addition to specifying norms of behavior for journalists, news professionalism establishes a reward system for journalists. That is, journalists will look to their profession for recognition of professional success. However, a reward system that is determined by criteria outside direct management control would, on the surface, appear to be another source of conflict between professionals and business organizations.[30] The assumption is that professinal employees will look to the profession and not to their business organization for rewards. In other words, the ideals of the profession will be more of a concern to professionals than are the goals of the organization.

Kornhauser argues that to accommodate professional employees business organizations have been forced to develop two types of career ladders: the management ladder and the professional ladder.[31] The management ladder is the traditional measure of success within business. Successful employees are rewarded by moving into the management hierarchy and becoming part of the decision-making team. The professional ladder was instituted to reward successful professionals by increasing their salaries and rank without having to increase their supervisory or managerial responsibilities. The professional ladder provides professionals with "advances in salary and status without taking on administrative duties. Instead of greater authority, they are rewarded with greater freedom to engage in their specialties."[32] Without the professional ladder, successful professionals could be forced to join the management ladder, which would deprive an organization of the services of its

top professional employees.[33]

But the problem associated with the professional ladder, according to Goldner and Ritti, is that there is only a negligible increase in authority for the professional who moves up the professional ladder. The successful professional has little say in the decision-making processes of the organization. Goldner and Ritti argue that the professional ladder is actually a very effective method of "cooling out" professional employees who have been unable to advance within the management (power) hierarchy.[34] This "cooling out" process actually begins with the socialization of the individual to the profession, when the new professional learns what it means to be a professional.[35] Professional employees, who would otherwise be considered failures for not moving into management, are provided with an alternative definition of success by the professional ladder. The professional ladder enables a business organization to placate its dedicated professionals, who are necessary for the success of the organization, without having to provide opportunities on the management ladder.

Applying these observations to journalism, it appears that a professional ladder exists within news organizations. The structure of the news department permits management to promote successful journalists without having to bring them into the organization's decision-making process. As successful journalists move up the professional ladder in the news department, they have more individual freedom to pursue stories without carrying more responsibility for decisions concerning the allocation of scarce organizational resources. By providing opportunities for upward movement, the news organization is able to maintain the loyalty of key professionals without providing access to the actual power hierarchy of the organization. Although some journalists move onto the management ladder and into key management positions, most journalists use the professional ladder as their gauge of success, and movement on that

ladder will be determined by professional norms. The viability of the professional ladder as a measure of success is the result of journalists' professional training, and it is part of the romantic lore of the profession. Journalism schools, stories about crusading journalists and journalists themselves have all contributed to making the professional ladder a means of measuring success.

Intra-organizational Controls

From the point of view of management, news professionalism is an efficient and effective means of controlling the behavior of journalists. Still, it provides journalists with more freedom in reporting and editing news than most news organizations can permit. To further limit journalists and to protect their own interests, news organizations have established news policies that affect the reporting and editing of stories. As Breed and others have shown, all news organizations have news policies,[36] but the nature of news policies will vary from organi- zation to organization. Just as news professionalism can be seen as a trans- organization control mechanism because it is shared by all journalists, the idiosyncratic news policies of news organizations can be seen as an intra-organizational control mechanism.

Together, these two control mechanisms direct and control the actions of journalists.

The remainder of this paper presents the results of a participant observation study of a medium-sized daily newspaper located in a Midwestern city. As a participant observer, I worked as an editor on the copy desk which provided an exceptionally good vantage point to observe how the news policies of this paper are enforced. Most of the existing studies of the news-making process have concentrated on major metropolitan news organizations. These news

organizations are very atypical of dailies when compared to the demographic data for all daily newspapers in the United States. Most newspapers have relatively small circulations (the median circulation is under 25,000), most newspapers are owned by large chains (over 60 percent of the dailies in the United States are owned by chains and chains control over 70 percent of daily newspaper circulation) and nearly all newspapers are monopolies (over 97 percent of the cities that have a daily have only one). The newspaper examined in this paper is part of a large newspaper chain, has a circulation of about 17,000 and is the only commercial daily published in the city. Based on a comparison with the demographic data for all daily newspapers in the United States, this paper seems fairly representative of the typical daily. Finally, unlike nearly all of the so-called participant observation studies of the news-making process, I actually joined the staff of the paper with the specific purpose of studying its news operation. As a researcher/journalist, I was able to see and understand behavior that would have been unavailable to a researcher who relied just on observing and interviewing.

News professionalism is a double-edged sword. Since news professionalism is independent of any one news organization, it provides journalists with an independent power base than can be used in confrontations with a news organization's management. The tenets of news professionalism limit the ability of management to be directly involved in the news process. A publisher who continually intervenes in news coverage would run the risk of undercutting the professionalism of his or her journalists and, if the intervention resulted in biased reporting, would hurt the reputation of the newspaper. In journalism, there is a taboo against management's interference in the news process. Of course, this taboo does have some benefits for management because it is a good argument to put off advertisers, politicians or others who may want management to intervene in news coverage.

To an extent, news professionalism shields journalists from the intervention of management by allowing journalists to deflect management without jeopardizing their position in the news organization. For example, the publisher of the paper wanted the news department to follow up on a series of stories on drug trafficking in the city that had appeared in a newspaper published in a nearby city. Both the editor and the city editor[37] believed that there was nothing to the stories and that they did not warrant assigning a reporter to follow them up. During a meeting of the paper's editors, the city editor said, "We've gone through this before, doesn't he [the publisher] believe us when we tell him there is nothing there?" The editor responded saying, "[The publisher] says that if the [other paper's] stories are not true that we've got to get the city manager, the mayor or [another civic leader] to say so." The editor decided not to assign a reporter to the story saying that he was not going to follow up on stories just to satisfy the publisher. Later, when the publisher was interviewed about the amount of attention his story suggestions received from the editor, he said that he has talked to the editor a number of times about story ideas but he cannot get the editor to follow up on his ideas. The publisher went on to say that this has caused considerable friction between the editor and him. None of the journalists could recall any instance when the publisher bypassed the editor and talked directly to reporters about story ideas. The city editor summed it up by saying, "The publisher is an old newsman and wants to have some impact on the news operation. He doesn't have a great impact on the news operation. His story ideas do get attention, but I wouldn't go so far as to say that every one he gives he gets an immediate response to."

Within any business organization that employs professionals, there is at least one administrator between management and the professional employees. The underlying tension in this position is the need, on the one hand, to protect

professional employees from interference by management and, on the other hand, to direct the work of the professional employees according to the goals and interest of the organization.[38] In the news organization, it is the editor who functions both as a professional and as a member of the news organization's management. Any examination of the enforcement of news policies must therefore focus on the editor as the executive in charge of the news operation. At the paper I studied, the editor uses a variety of methods to ensure that his journalists followed the paper's news policies. They included editorial meetings, story assignments, reprimands and supervision of the paper's production.

During the editorial meeting, the editor selects stories for the newspaper from news budgets prepared by the junior editors, and tells the city editor which reporters to assign to various stories. He also uses the meeting to criticize the work of the news staff, which takes the form of marking up a copy of yesterday's paper, pointing out poor layout, reporting problems and the lack of editing poorly written stories. The criticisms are couched in terms of improving the professional competence of the news staff. And although the criticisms can be severe, the editor rarely criticizes a reporter directly, preferring to have the news editor pass on his criticisms to the reporter.

Also during the editorial meeting, the editor acts as arbitrator in disputes among the junior editors. At this particular newspaper, the news editor, the city editor and the sports editor all have about equal authority in the news department, although technically the news editor ranks next in authority after the editor. In disputes among the junior editors, they attempt to gain the support of the editor. Instead of settling the dispute among themselves, the junior editors rely on the decisions of the editor. This procedure avoids open conflict in the news department and permits the junior editors to maintain a friendly work atmosphere in the newsroom. On the other hand, it provides the editor with an opportunity to arbitrate differences according to the paper's

news policy. In effect, disputes among junior editors act as an early warning system for potential policy violations.

The editorial meeting is also crucial for understanding how the editor controls the content of the newspaper because it is during these meetings that he decides which stories to cover or ignore. The editor is not heavy-handed in making story decisions; nor will he not assign a reporter to a story because it may have policy implications. But his involvement in the story selection process minimizes confrontations with reporters over policy issues. It is easier for the editor to control story assignments than to have to kill or tone down a story after it has been written. Reporters see story assignments as part of the editor's professional responsibilities, but they perceive heavy-handed editing as the editor's bowing to the interests of management. By controlling assignments, the editor ensures that the more important stories, which are more likely to have policy implications, are covered by the more trustworthy reporters.

During an interview, a reporter complained that the editor uses story assignments to prevent the staff from covering potentially controversial stories. He said:

> A serious issue in this area is land-use planning. The editor knows this and yet he will not assign me to cover regional planning on a regular basis. Coverage of regional planning and land use is opposed by real estate agents and land developers. I am willing to do a series of stories on it during my off hours, but I receive no support from [the editor]. The editor always finds things for me to do. It's passive discouragement. He's afraid of it. I believe he doesn't want to irritate his social circle. He's afraid of the powerful bankers in the city. It's easier for the paper to kick around other people. The paper is scared into covering non-important issues. I could do a good piece on tenant abuse [by] landlords, but that'll upset too many people in the city. The paper won't cover anything which gets at what's wrong with the city. The editor steers the paper away from controversy.

Even so, quite a few stories deal with controversial issues that have policy implications. Although the editor is not involved in the day-to-day editing process, he does edit all stories that deal with controversial issues. During a interview, the editor said, "I like to see all sensitive stories and [potentially] libelous stuff especially. A lot of copy goes across my desk for approval. I like to keep my hands in the newsroom."

Reporters who have had their stories changed have strong feelings about the editor and why he changed their stories. In one instance, a reporter had been assigned to a story involving the largest car dealership in the city. According to the reporter, the owner of the dealership was being sued by a lawyer whose new car broke down shortly after he had purchased it. The lawyer wanted a new car, but the dealer claimed that the purchase agreement only required that he repair the car. The reporter said, "When I wrote the story I had to give it to the editor to look at. He changed my story. He considerably toned it down. He did it because the car dealer is very powerful in the city."

Another reporter talking about the editing of controversial stories said, "This paper is very conservative. There's creative and degrading conservatism, and we are caught up in the degrading type. When I first signed on here I was told our editor was somewhat left of center. I find him to be very right of center now. Our editorial page, for example, is notorious for its lack of stance."

This reporter was involved in an incident that provides some insights into what happens when news policy is violated. The reporter wrote a story about a teen-age girl who claimed that her father had molested her and was the father of her baby. In the story, the reporter used both the names of the father and daughter, and he relied primarily on the father's attorney for most of his information. In the absence of the editor, the city editor cleared the story for publication. According to the city editor and the reporter, when the

editor read the story in the paper he became very angry and both were severely reprimanded. Later, during interviews, I asked all three about the incident. The reporter maintained that he had written the story objectively relying on both the defense attorney and the assistant county attorney. The reporter thought that he had written a good story and that the editor had overreacted. The city editor said that at first he had thought that he had made the right decision, but after talking with the editor, he believed that he had made a professional error by not asking more questions about the story. The editor said that he had two major problems with the story. First, the paper has a policy of not publishing the names of rape victims, but the reporter had used both the father's and daughter's names. Second, the reporter relied too heavily on the defense attorney which biased the story by making the father appear to be the innocent victim of his lascivious daughter. To make matters worse, the editor said, the county attorney dropped all charges against the father after the daughter admitted that her boyfriend was the father of her baby. The editor said that the story had destroyed the daughter's life and had held the family up to public ridicule. According to the city editor, the paper ran a retraction saying that the original story had been run by mistake. He said that this incident had soured the relationship between the reporter and the editor, who no longer had any faith in the reporter's professional abilities. The editor told me that this reporter had no future at the newspaper. During my time at the newspaper, this reporter's stories received special attention by the copy desk and, as a copy editor, I was told to be especially watchful for biased and incomplete reporting.

Reprimands or the threat of being reprimanded offer yet another method of controlling the news staff. Although I witnessed only a few reprimands, the ones I witnessed and the ones staff members told me about were severe. Usually just the fear of being reprimanded is enough to keep most staff members in

line. Reprimands help to establish policy not only for the journalists who receive them but for those who witness or hear of them. In some cases, the policy established by a reprimand may not actually be part of the newspaper's policy at all. For example, a junior editor had heard the editor tell another junior editor that he did not want the word "Soviet" used in a headline. The junior editor had interpreted this to mean that "Soviet" must not be used anywhere in the paper, and he would change "Soviet" to "Russian" in all stories he edited. When I asked the editor if I should change "Soviet" to "Russian" in stories I edited, he said that he had no objections to the word in stories but that it should not be used in headlines because it was not accurate. The junior editor had assumed that the newspaper had a policy that prohibited the use of the word.

The final control over the content of the newspaper lies in overseeing the production of the paper. The editor makes it a point to check all pages before they are removed from the production area, but he pays particularly close attention to the front page and the late page.[39] In fact, neither the front page nor the late page can be taken from the production area without the editor's permission. And even though it is difficult to change stories or headlines once copy is set and pasted on the pages, it was not uncommon for the editor to order some last minute changes.

Junior editors often were irritated when the editor checked their work. One junior editor said, "When the editor is looking over your shoulder you always wonder what he is thinking about. In general his suggestions are good. And usually I don't mind his looking over my shoulder, but it has a tendency to be irritating." Another junior editor said that he was especially bothered by the editor's tendency not to explain why he ordered changes in stories or headlines. He said, "I go ahead and make the changes the editor wants, but I don't know why he ordered the changes." As a result, the junior editors defer even

minor editing decisions to the editor. As one reporter put it, "The news desk is frustrated, overburdened and under the thumb of the editor. The desk doesn't take on much responsibility. They pass the buck and let the editor make all the decisions. The editors are not free to make policy decisions."

Although all of the journalists working for the newspaper had complaints about the editor, none said that the editor was professionally inept or that he had sold out to management. On the contrary, the journalists thought that the editor was in a no-win situation, being caught between management and the news department. And most of the journalists though that the editor did a good job of protecting them from managerial interference. Yet, the editor must walk a fine line between management and news professionalism. To be successful he must convince his staff that the newspaper's policies do not conflict with news professionalism. By examining two incidents involving policy, we can see that news policy has been incorporated into the news professionalism of the paper's journalists.

Part of the newspaper's news policy reflects the management's decision to define the paper as a family newspaper. One aspect of this policy affects selection of photographs. A junior editor said, "The editor has a policy on pictures. No bloody photos like accidents are used. It's policy." Another junior editor said, "[the newspaper] is a family newspaper. Once in awhile I get called on the carpet for doing something which management doesn't like. I consult with the editor whenever something is possibly upsetting. Nothing of bad taste--sex, immoral, bodies--gets in unless it is really necessary. We ran a picture of a student beating a hung body in Thailand once, but I consulted with the editor before using it."

When Pope Paul VI died, the Associated Press Wirephoto service carried many pictures of the pope lying in state. The front page of the newspaper was "dummied" with a photo of the pope lying in state surrounded by his guards and

church officials. Because the page contained a photo of a body, the junior editor brought the dummy to the editor for his approval, but he was turned down. The junior editor said, "We don't run pictures of bodies on the front page." In its place, the paper used a photograph taken a month earlier of the pope blessing a crowd. But because the death was such a big news story, the paper did run photographs of the pope lying in state on some inside pages.

In the second incident, a man convicted of murdering a 10-year-old girl had had his conviction overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court. A new trial was ordered and it was held in a nearby city. The newspaper did not send a reporter to cover the trial but relied on the Associated Press coverage. The defense rested its case on whether or not the accused had sexually assaulted the girl, and much of the news stories about the trial dealt with the sexual assault. One day a junior editor showed me what he had edited out of the story. Almost every sentence that had contained the words "vagina," "rectum" or "sperm" had been deleted from the story. The junior editor said that he had given the story to the editor to check and he had cut even more out of the story. The junior editor said, "A lot of our readership don't care to see those words used in the paper. This is a family newspaper. I know that's how the editor thinks. On other papers I would have used it but not here in [this newspaper]." During an interview, the editor was asked about the editing of the trial stories. He said, "The reason parts of the stories were edited out is because I would not want to have to define the terms used in the stories to my 10-year-old son if I had one. [This newspaper] is a family newspaper which goes into people's homes and youngsters read it. The editing of the stories did not do readers a disservice because the stuff edited out wasn't necessary to show [the man's] defense."

During interviews with the paper's journalists, they were asked about these and other incidents involving the paper's policy of not publishing

potentially offensive material. None of them believed that the policy affected the ability of the newspaper to inform its readers. All of the journalists had accepted the policy and it had become part of their professional task. A few of them provided examples of where they thought that the policy had gone too far and had affected the news that was reported. But when other journalists were asked about these examples, they tended to stress personality differences between a reporter and the editor and not issues involving professional norms. Except for those involved in the incidents, most of the journalists believed that the editor had been right to reject or edit stories because the reporters had acted in an unprofessional manner. The journalists at this newspaper are convinced that the policy of protecting readers from potentially offensive material does not interfere with the norms of news professionalism, and they have come to accept news policy as a natural part of their jobs.

As long as news policy does not force journalists to violate the norms of news professionalism, there is no reason to assume that journalists will see news policy as a constraint on their work, even though it does limit the type of stories that can be reported. Since journalists accept news policy as a natural part of their work situation, news policy should not be seen as a source of conflict between journalists and a news organization's management. News policy, as Sigelman notes, is not instituted to ensure that management will win conflicts with journalists; rather, it is used to avoid conflicts because journalists accept news policy and are guided by it when reporting and editing the news.[40]

Conclusion

Drawing upon organizational theory and the literature of professionalism, this paper argues that news professinalism is an efficient and effective means

for controlling the professional behavior of journalists. The paper attempts to show how the norms of news professionalism determine the legitimate arenas and sources of news in this country. Although journalists do not set out to report the news so that the existing politico-economic system is maintained, their professional norms end up producing stories that implicitly support the existing order. In addition, the professional norms legitimize the existing order by making it appear to be the natural state of affairs. The tenets of news professionalism result in news coverage that does not threaten either the economic position of the individual news organization or the overall politico-economic system in which the news organization operates. Also, news professionalism produces news stories that permit news organizations to maximize audience size and to maintain firm control over the marketplace. In the final analysis, news professionalism biases news on the societal level.

Since news professionalism is independent of any one news organization, news professionalism provides journalists with an independent power base that can be used against management. To minimize the potential for conflict, management needs to establish policies that further limit the professional behavior of its journalists. Although the specific nature of these policies will vary from organization to organization, the purpose of the policies does not. News policies lessen the potential conflict between journalists and management, and there is no reason to assume that an organization's policies will be a source of tension between management and journalists. Provided, of course, that policies conform to the norms of news professionalism.

The organizational nature of news is determined by the interplay between the trans-organizational control mechanism represented by news professionalism and the intra-organizational control mechanisms of news policies. Together, these control mechanisms help to establish boundaries for the professional behavior of journalists. It would be wrong to assume that these boundaries

dictate specific actions on the part of journalists; rather these boundaries provide a framework for action. The boundaries are broad enough to permit journalists some creativity in the reporting, editing and presentation of news stories. But, on the other hand, the boundaries are narrow enough so that journalists can be trusted to act in the interest of the news organization.

Footnotes

[1]The author would like to thank Michael Schudson, University of California, San Diego, and Hanno Hardt, University of Iowa, for their comments on early drafts of this paper.

[2]Everett Cherrington Hughes, Men and Their Work (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958), p. 45.

[3]Although most of the references in this paper will be to the print media, the arguments can also be applied to the electronic media.

[4]See Charles Perrow, Organizational Analysis: A Sociological View (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1970) and James D. Thompson, Organizations in Action (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

[5]See Paul R. Laurence and Jay W. Lorsch, Organization and Environment (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1969).

[6]See Arthur L. Stinchcombe, "Bureaucratic and Craft Administration of Production: A Comparative Study," Administrative Science Quarterly 4 (1959): 168-187 and Richard H. Hall, "Professionalization and Bureaucratization," American Sociological Review 33 (1968): 92-104.

[7]Magali Sarfatti Larson, The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 168. Emphasis appears in the original.

[8]William Kornhauser, Scientists in Industry: Conflict and Accommodation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 12. Emphasis appears in the original.

[9]See Philip Elliot, The Sociology of the Professions (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) and Larson, op. cit.

[10]Larson, op. cit., pp. 136-158.

[11]Ibid., p. 14-15.

[12]See Elliot, op. cit.

[13]For an interesting discussion of the rise of schools of engineering, see David Noble, American by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).

[14]Larson, op. cit., p. 47.

[15]See Terence J. Johnson, Professions and Power (London: Macmillan, 1972).

[16]See Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966).

[17]Larson, op. cit., p. 142. See Robert H. Wiebe, The Search for Order: 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

[18]Larson, op. cit., p. 145.

[19]Ibid., p. 199.

[20]Stinchcombe, op. cit.

[21]See John W.C. Johnstone, Edward J. Slawski and William W. Bowman, The News People (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 35-37.

[22]Ibid., p. 65.

[23]Bernard Roscho, Newsmaking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 55.

[24]E. Barbara Phillips, "Approaches to Objectivity: Journalistic vs. Social Science Perspectives" in Paul M. Hirsch, Peter V. Miller and F. Gerald Kline (eds.), Strategies for Communication Research (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977), p. 68.

[25]See Gaye Tuchman, "Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity," American Journal of Sociology 77 (1972): 660-679.

[26]The term "monopoly" is being used in both its economic and ideological sense. For a discussion of monopoly in this context, see Bruce Owen, Economics and Freedom of Expression (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1975).

[27]Gaye Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality (New York: The Free Press, 1978), pp. 82-103.

[28]Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News (New York: Pantheon, 1979), pp. 276-278.

[29]Tuchman, Making News, pp. 44-45.

[30]See Fred H. Goldner and R.R. Ritti, "Professionalization as Career Immobility," American Journal of Sociology 72 (1967): 489-502.

[31]See Kornhauser, op. cit.

[32]Ibid., p. 205.

[33]If only the management ladder existed, a professional who refused a promotion into management in order to continue his or her professional work would be defined as a failure by management. Without a professional ladder, professionals would reach the pinnacle of their corporate careers quite rapidly and would be blocked from any further advancement.

[34]Goldner and Ritti, op. cit., pp. 497-501.

[35]Ibid.

[36]See Warren Breed, "Social Control in the News Room" in Wilbur Schramm (ed.), Mass Communication (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1960), Robert Darnton, "Writing News and Telling Stories," Daedalus 104 (1975): 175-

193 and Rodney W. Stark, "Policy and the Pros: An Organizational Analysis of a Metropolitan Newspaper," Berkeley Journal of Sociology 7 (1962): 11-31.

[37]The editor is the executive in charge of the news department. The other editors will be referred to as junior editors or by their titles in order to distinguish them from the editor.

[38]Kornhauser, op. cit., p. 60.

[39]The late page is the last news page to be produced. Late breaking news stories that do not warrant remaking the front page are placed on this page.

[40]Lee Sigelman, "Reporting the News: An Organizational Analysis," American Journal of Sociology 79 (1973): 132-151.